

Mt. Calvert
(Mt. Calvert), Md.
Prince Georges Co
UPPER MARLBOROUGH VICINITY

HABS No. MD-176

HABS
M.D.

17. MARBURY

7.

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
District of Washington, D.C.

Historic American Buildings Survey
Delos H. Smith, District Officer,
1707 Eye St., N.W., Washington, D.C.

Handwritten initials

Addendum To:
MOUNT CALVERT
(Charleston)
16302 Mount Calvert Road
Upper Marlboro
Prince George's County
Maryland

HABS NO. MD-176

HABS
MD
17-MARBURY,
7-

PHOTOGRAPHS AND
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20013-7127

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

MOUNT CALVERT
(Charles Town)

HABS NO. MD-176

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7-

Location: 16302 Mount Calvert Road, Upper Marlboro,
Prince George's County, Maryland

Present Owner: Mrs. Eleanor Brown (also current
occupant)

Present Use: Private residence

Significance: Mount Calvert is an outstanding example
of a Federal-style brick plantation house
in Prince George's County. It is
distinguished by its pent chimneys and
its elaborate Federal-period interiors,
among the finest in the county.

Mount Calvert is the site of the first
county seat of Prince George's County.
On April 23, 1696, the appointed justices
of the county court met at this site to
formally bring the county into existence.
It remained the county seat for twenty-
five years until moved to Upper Marlboro,
in 1721. The house, Mount Calvert, is
all that remains to mark the site of the
original county seat.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date(s) of erection: The main block was built during
the late-18th century. It appears in the Prince George's
County tax assessments of 1796. An 1809 notice of sale
also describes the improvements as "a good brick Dwelling
house, two stories high, nearly new, a good kitchen..."
(*National Intelligencer*, 26 June 1809). It was added to,
possibly incorporating the existing kitchen building
(mentioned above), in the mid-19th century (ca. 1856).
This is evidenced by a March 1859 notice of sale which
states, "The improvements... consist of commodious Brick
Dwelling-house, which has been recently repaired and
enlarged" (Equity #271).

2. Original and subsequent owners:

- prior to 1796 John Brown, by the end of the century, had acquired approximately 600 acres of Mt. Calvert which had been occupied by the Groome family for most of the 18th century. Brown's plantation appears in the county tax assessment records of 1796.
- 1809 John Brown died. Property becomes the possession of daughter, Eleanor, and her husband, William Bradley Beanes.
- 1835 Deed AB #12:202
John Johnson and Thomas S. Alexander, trustees appointed by the Chancery Court to sell the real estate of Eleanor Brown Beanes
To
John Brookes
- 1859 Equity #271,
William Fowler
vs
Richard B.B. Chew as administrator of the estate of John Brooks
Richard B.B. Chew, trustee is appointed to sell "Mt. Calvert," etc., 605-1/2 acres
- 1864 Deed FS 2:47, 16 June 1864
Richard B.B. Chew, (son-in-law) acting as trustee for the estate of John Brookes
To
Samuel H. Berry
Mt. Calvert, 605-1/2 acres, \$27,768.23
- 1871 Equity #897
Heirs of Samuel H. Berry
vs
Thomas Clagett
Charles Clagett, trustee appointed to sell the property by right of mortgage on Mount Calvert from Samuel H. Berry to Thomas Clagett
- 1873 Thomas Clagett died 27 August 1873
- 1878 Equity #1201
Thomas Clagett & Mary M. Clagett, et al.
vs.
Caroline Clagett et al.

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- 1880 Deed WAJ 1:320
 Charles Clagett, trustee, son of Thomas
 Clagett deceased
 To
 Harriet J. Marr
- 1922 Deed FS #2:93, WAJ #1:320, #182:197
 Alem K. Marr
 To
 David E. Brown
- 1972 Deed #4117:486
 David E. Brown
 To
 David E. Brown III

3. Builder, contractor, suppliers: The main block of Mount Calvert was built for John Brown. The later wing was built by carpenter, Charles Turner, for owner John Brookes according to an 1856 charge against the Brookes estate for "painting, graining, glazing, varnishing, etc. the Mount Calvert house and office, inside and outside, bricks, walls, roofs, etc. (Administration #453).

4. Original plans and construction: The original section of the house--the main block to the west side--consisted of a stairhall with a (dining) room to the rear and a parlor to the west side, with a smaller parlor adjoining it. There are chambers above the first-story rooms.

5. Alterations and additions: An unusual addition was made in two parts, ca. 1856, probably incorporating the old kitchen building. Both parts of the addition are two stories high, but lower than the main block, and have a shallow-pitched shed roof. The room closest to the main block is (and probably was) the kitchen. According to the current owner, there was a fireplace (later a stove) in this kitchen section (behind the dining room fireplace) which has since been closed over. This section has its own stairway with rooms above. The second section of this addition consists of a single room up and down (no fireplaces). Finally, a single-story frame addition was made to the rear of the kitchen section ca. 1970. Part of this addition was formerly a porch (as seen in the 1936 HABS photograph) and is now a utility area and bathroom. There formerly was a porch across the facade of the main block as evidenced by the ghost images.

B. Historical Context:

The historical significance of the site predates that of the current dwelling house. On April 23, 1696 the appointed justices of the county court met at this site to take their oaths of office and formally bring the county into existence. Mount Calvert was undoubtedly chosen for its location at the confluence of the Patuxent River and the Western Branch. Most of the early settlement of what was to become Prince George's County occurred along the Patuxent River by people migrating from the first Maryland settlements in the southern part of the state. It was also the only existing town, however small, in the area.

It remained the county seat for twenty-five years. In 1721 the Maryland General Assembly determined that Upper Marlboro would be a more convenient town site, and the county seat was moved there. After the move to Upper Marlboro, Mount Calvert continued to be used as a ferry site, but the town slowly diminished. Nothing is left today of the original town. The Mount Calvert residence, although not contemporary with the original town, is all that remains to mark the site of the first county seat.

The early town was officially known as "Charles Town." The county court first met in a church, and later a courthouse was built. According to local tradition, the house at Mount Calvert incorporates the 17th-century building which served as Prince George's first courthouse. However, all visible features of the main block appear to date from the end of the 18th century and the wing, from the mid-19th century. Thus, Mount Calvert should be considered a late 18th-century residence.

After the courthouse was moved to Upper Marlboro, the Groome family owned the land for most of the 18th century. By the end of the century, John Brown had acquired approximately 600 acres of Mt. Calvert. It was during his ownership that the main block of the current dwelling was constructed. Brown operated a tobacco farm here. He died in 1809, at which point the property was sold to pay his debts. An advertisement for sale described it as,

...bounded on one side by the river Patuxent for more than a mile where it is navigable... with the advantages of an excellent fishing landing. The land is well adapted to the production of tobacco,

corn and all kinds of grain,... The improvements are a good brick Dwelling house, two stories high, nearly new, a good kitchen, several good tobacco houses and Barns, with every necessary building, all in good repair" (National Intelligencer, 26 June 1809).

Mount Calvert became the property of Brown's daughter, Eleanor, who married William Bradley Beanes in 1809. Mr. Beanes passed away in 1818. The property was then divided among his wife and two daughters, Eleanor retaining the portion bounded by the Patuxent including the brick dwelling (Prince George's County Chancery, AB#2:94) It remained the Beanes family home into the 1820s.

After her death, trustees were appointed to sell the property. It was purchased by John Brookes, a merchant and innkeeper from Upper Marlboro, in February of 1835 (Deed AB #12:202). Brookes was also a commissioned captain during the War of 1812; he retired to farming here at Mount Calvert. An addition was made to Brookes house ca. 1856, probably incorporating the old kitchen and connecting it to the main block. Evidence of this is seen in an 1856 charge against the Brookes estate by carpenter Charles Turner for "painting, graining, glazing, varnishing, etc. the Mount Calvert house and office, inside and outside, bricks, walls, roofs, etc." (Administration file #453). John Brookes died in 1858 and the property was sold by trustee. Mount Calvert, its physical appearance, use and milieu, are best revealed by a March 1859 description given in a advertisement for public sale which appeared in the Planters Advocate newspaper:

Mount Calvert, the home place, contains six hundred and twenty acres. It is eligibly situated on the Patuxent river, four miles below Upper Marlborough, and is well known as one of the most beautiful and desirable residences in Prince George's county; having a valuable private landing for the shipment of produce, and several convenient warehouses for its accommodation and the storage of goods from Baltimore, where steamboats ply tri-weekly during the season for navigation. The improvements, all in good order, consist of a commodious Brick Dwelling-house, which has been recently repaired and enlarged and is convenient and comfortable in all its arrangements, and all the necessary out

houses, including a Stable and Carriage-house. Adjoining the premises are a large yard and garden well supplied with Ornamental and Shade trees, with two Springs of pure water in the enclosure; also a young orchard of several hundred choice Fruit trees. The farm buildings consist of a new overseer's house, ample quarters for servants, a large stable, two large corn houses, a two-story granary, a threshing-house, milk house and large cow house, centrally located and barns sufficient to cure seventy thousands pounds of tobacco. The soil is of good quality, and has been highly improved by the use of lime and other fertilizers; produces abundant crops of the best quality of tobacco, of grain and grass; is well supplied with wood and water; has several beautiful meadows and a valuable outlet of fine grazing ground sufficient to sustain all the farm stock nearly the entire year. Few farms combine so many natural advantages. In addition to its productiveness for cultivation, it is a most agreeable place of residence which, in season, affords the finest wild-duck shooting and a constant supply of fish and oysters. The growing crop of wheat, ninety bushels, will be sold with the land. The fields for cultivation the present year have already been cleared and are covered with a heavy clover and timothy turf. The whole place is under good fencing.

Mount Calvert was purchased by Judge Samuel H. Berry and remained in the Berry family into the 1870s. Samuel Berry served as Judge of the Circuit Court for 15 years. He died in 1871, the result of injuries incurred from falling when stepping off a train. The property was then conveyed to Thomas Claggett of Weston, who held Samuel Berry's mortgage. An advertisement for a trustee's sale (Equity #897) of the property described it in 1873 as improved by a....

Large and Handsome Brick Mansion... The farm buildings, which are located on a central portion of the estate, and separated from the Mansion part, consist of an Overseer's House, ample tenements for laborers or hands, both white and colored; a Large Stable, Two large Corn Houses, Granary, Threshing and Mill house, Large Cow Houses, and Five Large Barns, sufficient to cure eighty thousand pounds of tobacco. The soil is good, and produces....

abundant crops of Tobacco, Grain and Grass....

The Claggetts were large landholders in the area. Along with Mount Calvert came the neighboring McKnew farm, also formerly held by Samuel Berry. Unfortunately, Mount Calvert was evidently tenanted and neglected as a result. Thomas Claggett had passed away in 1873. An equity case eventually ensued over the division of Thomas Claggett's property. It was decided that the Mount Calvert and McKnew farms be sold because, according to the interrogative of Charles Claggett and others, "The two aforesaid farms are rapidly depreciating in value, the buildings are going to decay and, that it is impossible to procure good tenants" (Equity #1201). Thus, in 1878, his son Charles sold Mount Calvert to Harriet Marr. The Marr family sold the property to David E. Brown in 1922 and it remains in the Brown family today.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: Mount Calvert is one of the finest surviving examples of a Federal-style plantation house found in Prince George's County. Thus, it differs from the other outstanding examples of the period in that it does not have a Georgian plan, and is more modest in size. Its plan is instead asymmetrical--typical of the Federal period--with the shallow stairhall allowing for a room behind it. It has the pent chimneys typical of southern Tidewater architecture. Other elements of its Federal styling include its nine-over-nine-light-sash windows, low-gabled and dormered roof, transomed frontispiece and dentilled cornice. It is without the exterior ornamentation of high-style, but instead takes a vernacular form with the adoption of southern architectural traditions such as the pent chimney. The interior, however, boasts elaborate Federal period interior trim including mantels, cornice, chair rail and stairway moldings.

2. Condition of fabric: Mount Calvert appears to be in very good, well-maintained condition both inside and out. The interior especially has retained its fine detailing.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: Mount Calvert has a two-story, three-bay-by-two-bay main block with a hipped roof. To the northeast are two adjoining brick additions, both two stories high, two bays wide and with a shed roof.

2. Foundations: The foundations are of brick.

3. Walls: The walls are brick, laid in a Flemish bond to the front and rear of the main block, and common bond (3:1) in the northeast and southwest side elevations and chimney stack. The two additions are both laid in common bond (5:1, with some variation). There appears to have been a thin stucco or whitewash finish which is now largely worn off. In the top portion of the walls of the additions, the brick varies in color from the rest of the wall suggesting that perhaps the roof line was raised in front (there is also a belt course at this point at the north rear of the middle section).

4. Structural system, framing: The house is of load-bearing brick construction. There are relieving arches in the basement of the main block for the fireplaces above.

5. Porches, stoops: There are brick stoops with metal balustrades at each entry including the south front, north rear and west side entries of the main block, and the south front of the middle addition and the east side of the easterly addition. A single porch also covers the south front of the two additions. The shed roof is supported by three large, square wooden posts resting on a brick patio. A former porch at the rear north of the middle section (appearing in a 1936 HABS photograph) has been enclosed and enlarged to the east, as part of a frame addition.

Heavy paint on the south front of the main block, from the top of the first-story bays down, suggest that it was once protected by a porch which ran the length of the main block. A 1936 HABS photograph shows a large concrete patio-like entry porch, with brick edging, and the ghost of a pedimented portico over the front entry, and no stoop at the west side entry. The 1936 HABS photograph shows the porch over the additions supported by heavy brick columns.

6. Chimneys: At the west side of the main block are two exterior chimneys, connected by a chimney pent. Both chimneys are shouldered, and there is a sloped weathering at the pent. The chimneys are brick, laid in a common bond with simple corbelling at the top. In the pent is a small, two-over-two-light-sash window (lighting the chimney closet). There is a third exterior brick chimney at the east side of the main block, to the north side of the roof ridge, between the main block and the addition.

7. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors: There are three doorways into the main block of the house. The main entry is located at the east end of the south front of the house, and has a simple architrave surround with a four-light transom and a flat-arched brick lintel. The north rear entry is to the center of the facade and has the same surround, transom and lintel. The west side entry has the same surround without the transom and with a plain brick (header) lintel. All have doors with wood panels below and nine lights above (replacements).

There are two entries into the middle section of the house. One at the south front has a plain narrow surround and a flat-arched brick lintel (what appears to be patching is found above the doorway, perhaps this door was added later). At the north rear there is an entry into the middle section via the enclosed porch. There is an entry at the east side which is slightly recessed with no surround or lintel.

b. Windows and shutters: The windows in the first story of the south front and north rear of the main block are nine-over-nine-light-sash windows with thin muntins. They have a plain wooden surrounds with pegged joints in the sill, and flat-arched brick lintels. The second-story windows are six-over-six-light-sash. At the west side of the main block, to the south front, there is a narrow four-over-four-light-sash window on both the first and second stories. On the second floor, between the stacks of the pent chimneys, is a six-over-six-light-sash window. Above it in the gable end is a six-light-casement window.

In both additions, the windows are six-over-six-

light-sash, larger in the second story. They too have a simple wooden surround with a flat-arched brick lintel. There are louvered shutters on all windows, with scrolled shutter dogs in the main block.

8. Roof:

a. Shape, covering: The main block of the house has a side-gabled roof. Both additions have a shed roof (higher in the south front). The roofs are covered with raised-seam metal.

b. Cornice, eaves: The main block has a small boxed cornice with a decorative band of crenelated molding beneath it. There is no overhang in the eaves. The gable ends are finished with a simple architrave trim. The additions have a plain boxed cornice void of ornamentation.

c. Dormers: There are two dormers on the south front of the main block. They are gabled with simple molding, and six-over-six-light-sash windows.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:

a. First floor: The main block of Mount Calvert has an asymmetrical floor plan, two rooms wide and two rooms deep. It enters into the stairhall, with the stairway along the east wall. To the west is a doorway into the front parlor, with a fireplace at the west wall, and double folding doors into a smaller back parlor to the north. This room also has a fireplace at the west wall, to the south of which is the doorway into the pent chimney closet, and to the north, an exterior door. This room adjoins the dining room to the east, which also adjoins the rear of the stairhall. At the north wall is an exterior doorway, and at the east wall is a fireplace, to the south of which is the doorway into the middle section or kitchen (the width of the wall at the doorway here indicates that it was built as an exterior rather than a partition wall). There is a stairway along the south wall of the kitchen, and an exterior doorway. To the north is a doorway into the current frame

addition, and to the east is a doorway into the end addition, also one room, with an exterior door on the east wall.

b. Second floor: There is a landing near the top of the stairway, with steps to the west into the main block, and to the east into the additions. In the main block there is a hallway to the center running east-west with three bedrooms which follow the floor plan of the first-story rooms (with fireplaces). In the addition, there is a hall along the front of the middle section. To the rear is a bath (there is no bath in the main block) and a closet. There is one room over the section to the end.

c. Basement: There is a basement under the main block only. It has brick walls with relieving arches for the fireplaces, and a concrete floor. It is partitioned off, also creating supporting walls for the rooms above.

2. Stairways: The main stairway is an open-string, two-flight stair. It runs along the east wall of the stairhall. There is a single-step landing at the foot of the stair, which then continues up with a landing near the top. At the landing, the main stair turns ninety degrees and runs along the back wall, up four steps to the east-west hallway. To the west of the landing is one step into the second floor of the additions. The balustrade has delicately turned balusters, two per step, and matching newel post. The flat, molded handrail is mitered into the newel cap. At the step ends are scrolled brackets with a scroll cut-out. The wall beneath is panelled. The newel post at the landing extends down with a simple pendant. There is a closet under the stair.

The back stair is an open-string, single-run stair which runs along the south wall. It has an unornamented balustrade with a square newel post with flat square newel cap and square balusters.

3. Flooring: The flooring throughout is of wide boards (kitchen has linoleum).

4. Wall and ceiling finish: Mount Calvert has some of the finest interior trim in the county. The first floor of the main block has elaborate cornices and chair rail,

the most decorative of which are in the front parlor. Here, the cornice, chair rail and mantel match. The cornice consists of cyma recta molding along the ceiling followed by a narrow bead-and-reel, a metope-and-triglyph band with a scotia below, a dentil molding with punched out holes above each dentil, and finally a narrow cyma reversa at the bottom. The chair rail repeats the same metope-and-triglyph pattern of the cornice. In the dining room, the cornice and chair rail are like that of the parlor, but both are without the metope-and-triglyph pattern. There is a simple crown-molding cornice in the back parlor. The baseboards are the same in all the rooms, consisting of a wide board with a bead and scotia above.

5. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors: The molding of the doorway between the front parlor and the stairhall is the most elaborate, being a shouldered, stepped-architrave trim. All other doorways in the main block have architrave or stepped architrave trim without the shouldering. There is a large doorway adjoining the front and back parlors with double, folding, four-panelled doors. Elsewhere, the doors are wooden, six-panel, cross-and-open-bible (four-panel door to closet under stair). In the doorway between the dining room of the main block and the kitchen of the addition there is an arched lintel under the plaster, indicating that this was an exterior doorway before the addition (photographed by owner during repair work).

b. Windows: Again, the window treatment in the front parlor is more elaborate than the other rooms. Like the doorway, the window surrounds are a shouldered, stepped architrave, and there are wood panels below the two front windows. All the windows have splayed reveals with panelled shutters that fold into them. The window surrounds in the other rooms is a stepped architrave.

6. Decorative features and trim: There are decorative mantelpieces, the most elaborate of which is in the front parlor. The face of the opening is plastered with a stepped architrave surround. There is a metope-and-triglyph pattern frieze, with a scrolled bracket to either side. Above this is dentilling with punched-out holes above each dentil, followed by a narrow metope-and-

triglyph-band and a narrow bead-and-reel. The mantel in the back parlor (and in the upstairs bedrooms) has the same profile as the parlor but without the ornamentation. The mantel in the dining room is also the same but with plain dentilling in the molding below the shelf. The hearths and firebacks are brick.

7. Hardware: There are box locks on the doors leading to the outside.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: Mount Calvert faces south-southeast on a point overlooking the confluence of the Patuxent River and the Western Branch. Its secluded location atop a knoll affords it an impressive, peaceful site with a vista of the river and surrounding marshlands and fields.

2. Historic landscape design: There are a number of very large, older trees and shrubs scattered on the hill which slopes down to the river in the front of the house. As mentioned in the 1859 notice for the sale of Mount Calvert, its site along the river provided it with a "private landing for the shipment of produce..."

3. Outbuildings: Numerous outbuildings are mentioned in the 1859 notice of sale including overseer's house, tobacco and cow barns, granary, stables, etc. However, there are no extant outbuildings at Mount Calvert.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Early Views: The Historic American Buildings Survey photographed Mount Calvert in 1934 and 1936. Two views, taken by photographer D.H. Smith in 1934, include the west gable end, and the northwest corner showing the rear and west side. Three views were taken later, on April 20, 1936, by photographer John Brostrup. These are of the southwest corner showing the west side and south front, from the northwest showing the north rear and west side, and a detail of the mantel on the west wall of the parlor. The only significant differences from these 1930s photographs are the porches (see Part II., B. 5.)

B. Bibliography:

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

Prince George's County Land Records, Prince
County Courthouse, Deeds and Equity Records as
cited in text.

Prince George's County Register of Wills, Prince
George's County Courthouse, Chancery and
Administration files, as cited in text.

Planter's Advocate, 7 July 1958 (advertisement for
sale of Mount Calvert).

2. Secondary and published sources:

Pearl, Susan G. (Prince George's County Historic
Preservation Commission). Maryland Historical
Trust State Historic Sites Inventory Form,
Mount Calvert, prepared June 1989.

Virta, Alan. Prince George's County, A Pictorial
History, Norfolk, Virginia: Donning Company
Publishers, 1984.

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

Documentation of Mount Calvert was undertaken as part of a cooperative project between the Historic American Buildings Survey and the Maryland National Capital Park and Planning Commission on behalf of the Prince George's County Historic Preservation Commission to document select sites throughout the county. A memorandum of agreement was signed in August of 1988 and the project, to span approximately one year, began in January of 1989. Gail Rothrock, Director and Susan G. Pearl, research historian, made the selection of sites and provided access to their historical research and information on file with the HPC, as well as their extensive knowledge of county history. The photography was done by HABS photographer Jack E. Boucher. The historical report was prepared by HABS historian Catherine C. Lavoie who also accompanied the photographer in the field for on site investigations.